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SENIOR CIA OFFICIAL DOUBTS GORBACHEV CAN MEND SOVIET SYSTEM

By Charles Aldinger

WASHINGTON, Oct 14, Reuter - Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev faces overwhelming opposition and apathy to his political reforms and it is doubtful he can fix the staggering Soviet economy, a senior CIA official said on Friday.

"The dictatorship of the Communist Party remains untouched and untouchable," Deputy Central Intelligence Agency Director Robert Gates said in a speech following last week's shakeup in Politburo membership orchestrated by Gorbachev.

Gates said Gorbachev could even now count on only three or four out of 12 Politburo members to completely support his push to de-centralize the Soviet bureaucracy.

"The forces he has unleashed are powerful, but so are the people and institutions he has antagonized," he told the American Association for the Advancement of Science in an unusually-outspoken analysis.

"It is by no means certain -- I would even say it is doubtful -- that Gorbachev can in the end rejuvenate the system."

The CIA official said Gorbachev has diminished the clout of some senior opposition, but has been unable to promote one of his most important proteges, Party Secretary Georgy Razumovskiy.

The Soviet people are also apathetic towards change, Moscow is faced with growing ethnic unrest and the KGB is worried about Eastern European reaction to reform, Gates added.

"There have been major nationalist demonstrations in nine of the 15 Soviet republics since last January," he said.

"Indeed, we counted some 600 popular disturbances since early 1987, about half of them relating to ethnic issues."

Gates conceded that during three years at the Soviet helm Gorbachev had put together an impressive arms control and political agenda.

"But the reforms do not go nearly far enough ... and the Politburo simply is unwilling to let go of the reins governing the economy."

Gorbachev has declared war on the party apparatus much as Stalin did in the late 1920s and 1930s, but bureaucrats and military officials are wary of his calls for moderation in defense spending and de-centralizing power, Gates said.

"The intelligencia are probably the only group that comes close to giving whole-hearted support -- a weak reed in the Soviet Union."

Reuter

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